



The Old Ironsides Report

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Iraqi Assistance Center Serves Baghdad Communities

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372nd MPAD

BAGHDAD, Iraq (July 23, 2003) - - An Iraqi man's house was destroyed by a bomb during the ground operations in Iraq.

It killed his two daughters and his brother. His wife and sons were injured and still require medical care.

Unsure of where to go for help, he went to the Iraqi Assistance Center at the Iraqi Forum, formerly known as the Baghdad Convention Center.

The IAC is run by soldiers from the 352nd Civil Affairs Command, an Army Reserve unit from Riverdale, Md. Its purpose was originally designed to serve members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Iraq — providing them with information about anything from security and safety on the roads to humanitarian assistance flights arriving at the Baghdad International Airport.

Their focus is on national-level issues, said Capt. Cameron Sellers, humanitarian assistance flight operations officer for the 352nd CACOM. However, its welcome desk has also assumed responsibility for directing Iraqi citizens, such as the man whose house was bombed, to the proper agency or organization that can address his needs.

In many ways, the IAC has become an advocacy group for Iraqis. The center employs Iraqi civilians as interpreters—but their job has evolved from simply translating for the soldiers to actually handling cases that Iraqis bring in.

"Our goal is eventually to hand the center over to the Iraqis," Sellers said.

The welcome desk sees an array of issues, said Luna Kamouna, an Iraqi interpreter who works there. "Civilians come to ask for assistance," she said.

"People's houses or cars were damaged and they want compensation." People with medical problems look to the center for information as well, along with people who have employment or housing concerns. Iraqis have also brought in information about



Staff Sgt. Albert Berlo, a civil affairs specialist with the 352nd Affairs Command assists members of non-governmental organizations at the Iraqi Assistance Center in the Iraqi Forum in Baghdad.

weapons caches or men who are wanted by coalition forces. Baghdad motorists, as well as members of non-governmental organizations, have come in simply looking for driving directions to locations in the city.

"There are 10 (Civil Military Operations Centers) in Baghdad to refer people to," Kamouna said. Many of the issues people have brought in to the IAC can be solved by soldiers in the neighborhood CMOCs, which are run by tactical civil affairs units, and specialize in handling neighborhood problems.

One of the goals of the welcome desk is to prevent people from being "ping-ponged" between agencies and organizations, Sellers said.

Although the IAC's concern is mainly for nationwide issues, there is a need to help the citizens who go there looking for answers.

"Time is an important factor in solving these problems," Sellers said. "Our duty is to help other organizations by getting people to the right place."

The unit will eventually transfer control of the welcome desk over to Iraqis, said Spc. Jacek Orzol, a civil affairs specialist with the 352nd CACOM "Whatever the new Iraqi government will look like," Sellers said, "the people must have an advocacy group. The assistance center will be a conduit for interaction with the new government."

NEWS

Taylor Declares Welcome for Peacekeepers

MONROVIA, Liberia (AP) - President Charles Taylor on Saturday urged international peacekeepers to hurry to Liberia and renewed pledges to step down when they arrive, as shelling brought new carnage to the capital's trapped people. President Bush, who has ordered U.S. troops to Liberia's coast to support a promised West African peace force, repeatedly has demanded that former-warlord Taylor cede power as part of any peace deal.

Israel Offers 2 Towns to Palestinians

JERUSALEM (AP) - A top Palestinian official expressed hope Saturday that Israel's easing of restrictions on movement by Palestinians is a first step toward faster implementation of the "road map" peace plan. As Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas met with President Bush in Washington on Friday, Israel announced it would transfer two West Bank towns to Palestinian control and remove three roadblocks in Palestinian areas.

Hundreds Hurt in Japanese Earthquakes

NARUSE, Japan (AP) - Three powerful earthquakes knocked out power grids, collapsed buildings and set off mudslides across northern Japan on Saturday. At least 268 people were hurt - suffering mostly minor injuries - and several hundred people were evacuated. An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.2 struck Miyagi, a rural state about 190 miles northeast of Tokyo, early Saturday morning. It followed a magnitude-5.5 tremor seven hours earlier.

Oddly Enough

Man Hires Limo to Drive Him to Holdup

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) -- Rick Beal wanted to grab some cash on the way to the airport - so he hired a limo and allegedly robbed a bank on the way. Beal hired the limousine Thursday and asked the driver to wait for him at a Bank of America branch around 11:00 a.m., according to police spokeswoman Maria Oropeza. Inside, Beal allegedly held up two tellers by "simulating a gun," and then used the limousine for his get away, Oropeza said. The driver, oblivious to what had happened, headed for San Francisco International Airport. A witness followed the limo and called police, who stopped the car. The unidentified driver was released. Police recovered all the money, but would not say how much. They did not know Beal's flight plans. Beal was being held in the San Francisco jail Thursday evening on two counts of bank robbery, Oropeza said.

SPORTS

Armstrong Closes in on Tour De France Win

NANTES, France (AP) - Lance Armstrong put himself in position for a record-tying fifth Tour de France title Saturday by finishing ahead of rival Jan Ullrich in a drama-packed time trial. Ullrich fell on the rain-slicked course, got back up and finished 11 seconds behind the American.

Body Is Found in Baylor Player Search

WACO, Texas (AP) - Authorities found a body Saturday in an area they had searched for missing Baylor basketball player Patrick Dennehy, but they could not immediately say if it was him. "We can confirm that there has been a body found, but we have no further information about that at this time," McClennan County sheriff's Capt. Paul Wash said. "It was in the same general vicinity that other searches have been conducted this week."

Entertainment

Jagger Celebrates 60th Today in Prague

PRAGUE, Czech Republic (AP) - Rolling Stones fans hoping for a glimpse of Mick Jagger's 60th birthday bash in Prague this weekend can't get no satisfaction. The Stones' frontman celebrates his birthday Saturday at a secret party in the Czech capital, where the Stones perform Sunday as part of their "Licks" world tour.



"How do you stay so calm about the stock market?"

This Day in History: 27 July, 1853

Architect Cyrus Lazelle Warner Eidlitz was born on this date in New York, New York. In 1904, Cyrus Eidlitz collaborated with Alexander McKenzie on the New York Times Building. Perhaps Eidlitz's most famous work, it filled a triangle at the base of Longacre Square, subsequently renamed Times Square.

Today, a band of electric lights mounted across the facade transmits news and announcements. The building remains a focal point of Times Square where crowds gather every December 31 to welcome in the New Year.